

Message Text

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ACTION LAB-04

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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
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AMEMBASSY MANILA
USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 2299

BRUSSELS FOR SENSER

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, ILO, SN
SUBJ: ILO: SIXTY-THIRD INTERNATIONAL LABOR CONFERENCE

REFS: A. STATE 103403; B. STATE 102699; C. STATE 103404;
D. KUALA LUMPUR 3169; E. MANILA 7746

SUMMARY: CHARGE MADE REPRESENTATIONS ON ILO TO OFFICIALS
OF FOREIGN AND LABOR MINISTRIES AND BRIEFED SINGAPORE NATIONAL
TRADES UNION CONGRESS (NTUC) SECRETARY-GENERAL ON OUR POSITION.
PRIOR TO THESE CALLS, WE HAD LEARNED THAT SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT
WAS NOT PLANNING TO ATTEND JUNE ILC. CHARGE URGED GOS TO RE-
CONSIDER THIS DECISION AND SUGGESTED THEY ACCREDIT TO ILC THE
HEAD OF THEIR GENEVA MISSION. HOWEVER, PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN
YEW'S HOSTILITY TO ILO MAKES IT UNLIKELY THAT GOS WILL DO SO.
END SUMMARY.

1. DRAWING ON INFORMATION CONTAINED IN REFTELS A AND B,
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CHARGE MADE REPRESENTATIONS ON ILO TO SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS LEE KHOON CHOY (WITH WHOM HOROWITZ MET
IN OCTOBER) AND LABOR PERMANENT SECRETARY WILLIAM CHENG (THE
HIGHEST AVAILABLE OFFICIAL IN LABOR) AND LEFT EACH AN AIDE
MEMOIRE ON THE SUBJECT. CHARGE ALSO EXPLAINED OUR POSITION
TO NTUC SECRETARY-GENERAL DEVAN NAIR WHO HAD DISPLAYED CONSID-
ERABLE INTEREST AND RECEPTIVITY DURING THE HOROWITZ VISIT TO

SINGAPORE LAST OCTOBER.

2. IN THESE MEETINGS, CHARGE STRESSED IMPORTANCE OF MODERATE THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES PLAYING AN ACTIVE ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL FORA SUCH AS THE ILO. HE OBSERVED WE WERE AWARE THAT SINGAPORE ALSO SHARED OUR DISPLEASURE WITH INCREASING POLITICIZATION OF ILO, AND URGED GOS TO RECONSIDER ITS DECISION NOT TO ATTEND THE CONFERENCE. HE SUGGESTED THAT IF IT WERE NOT CONVENIENT TO SEND A REPRESENTATIVE DIRECTLY FROM SINGAPORE, THE GOS MIGHT ACCREDIT TO ILC SOMEONE FROM THEIR GENEVA MISSION. CHARGE ALSO URGED GOS TO SUPPORT U.S. POSITION AT MEETING OF ASEAN LABOR MINISTERS IN THAILAND WHICH WILL DISCUSS THE ILO.

3. MINISTER OF STATE LEE, WHO HAD DELAYED SEEING CHARGE FOR SEVERAL DAYS, LISTENED SYMPATHETICALLY TO OUR POSITION AND PROMISED TO CONSIDER SENDING A REPRESENTATIVE TO THE CONFERENCE. HE ASKED IF MANY OTHER COUNTRIES WOULD BE ABSENT FROM THE ILC. WE REPLIED THAT WE DID NOT KNOW, BUT VOLUNTEERED THAT MALAYSIA AND THE PHILIPPINES WOULD BE ATTENDING (REFTELS D AND E).

4. PERMANENT SECRETARY CHENG OF LABOR MINISTRY SAID HE WOULD BRIEF LABOR MINISTER ONG PANG BOON ON U.S. POSITION PRIOR TO THE LATTER'S DEPARTURE FOR ASEAN LABOR MINISTERS CONFERENCE. CHENG ALSO NOTED HIS PLEASURE IN LEARNING FROM ILO DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL BERT BOLIN (WHO RECENTLY VISITED SINGAPORE) THAT SEVERAL COMMUNIST COUNTRIES WOULD BE CITED IN THIS YEAR'S ILC FOR VIOLATION OF ILO CONVENTIONS.

5. NTUC SECRETARY-GENERAL DEVAN NAIR SAID HE FULLY SHARED OUR CONFIDENTIAL

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CONCERNS ABOUT THE ILO. HE CONFESSED HIS PRIVATE WISH WAS THAT U.S. WOULD WITHDRAW FOR A COUPLE OF YEARS AND TEACH THE ILO A LESSON. BEING A TRADE UNION LEADER, HOWEVER, HE HAD TO TAKE A MORE RESPONSIBLE POSITION.

6. NAIR COMMENTED THAT GOS DISILLUSIONMENT WITH ILO WAS IN PART DUE TO ITS PROGRESSIVE POLITICIZATION, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY TO ILO'S CITATION OF SINGAPORE FOR VIOLATION OF A CONVENTION ON COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS. THIS ACTION WAS CAUSED BY SINGAPORE'S RESTRICTION ON NUMBER OF MONTHS OF BONUS PAYMENTS ALLOWED TO EMPLOYEES -- A RESTRICTION PROPOSED BY NTUC.

7. ACCORDING TO NAIR, PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW WAS FURIOUS WITH ILO CITATION AND ORDERED THAT SINGAPORE RENOUNCE THIS CONVENTION. TO SHOW ITS DISAPPROVAL, GOS NOW PAYS ITS DUES BUT DOES NOT ATTEND THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE. NAIR SAID THAT BOTH HE AND LABOR MINISTER ONG HAD ADVOCATED SCRAPPING THIS POLICY AND INSTEAD PARTICIPATING FULLY IN ILO TO HELP COUNTER-

ACT ITS DRIFT IN THE WRONG DIRECTION. HOWEVER, PRIME MINISTER LEE AND FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM DO NOT AGREE.

8. WHILE HE WOULD PREFER TO SEE GOS ATTEND THE JUNE ILC, NAIR SAID HE HAD ALREADY EXPRESSED HIS VIEWS AND INDICATED THAT THERE WAS NOTHING MORE HE COULD DO. NAIR ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE NTUC WOULD SEND A DELEGATE TO THE ILC, BUT ONLY TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMITTEE SESSIONS DEALING WITH RIGHTS OF PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES (SINGAPORE EMPLOYERS HAVE NOT PARTICIPATED IN ILC IN PAST AND WILL NOT DO SO THIS YEAR).

9. COMMENT: IN LIGHT OF PM LEE'S HOSTILITY TO ILO, WE CONSIDER IT MOST UNLIKELY THAT GOS WILL REVERSE ITS POSITION AND DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE. GOS WILL PROBABLY BE CONTENT TO PAY ITS DUES AND CONTINUE TO BENEFIT -- ALBEIT IN A LIMITED FASHION -- FROM ILO'S TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND OTHER PROGRAMS. GRANT

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